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MAP OF PART OF ABYSSINIA
TO ILLUSTRATE
Dr BLANC'S JOURNEY FROM METEMMA TO DAMOT

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ROUTE FROM METEMMA TO DAMOT.

WHEN, after thirteen months, Theodore at last acknowledged our mission and granted a surly reply to our third letter, he himself traced our route. He ordered us to proceed through the Soudan, and, arrived at Metemma—a Takruree settlement on the north-west frontier of Abyssinia—to communicate at once with him. We acted implicitly according to these instructions; and on the 28th of December, 1865, agreeably to his Majesty's latest commands, we passed the frontier, and proceeded, under escort, to repair to the Imperial camp, at the time in the province of Damot.

The distance from Metemma to Ashfa, the district where we met Theodore, is about 240 English miles; and to accomplish that journey we had to march through passes and defiles, follow the western shores of the Tana Sea, cross some of the finest provinces of Abyssinia, and ride over undulating plains graced by the presence of mighty herds of cattle, or walk single file amidst boundless cultivated fields.

Two years afterwards a gallant English army, landed by a Merewether and led by a Napier and a Staveley, marched from Zoula to Amba Magdala, a distance of some 320 miles, climbing mountains, descending wall-like precipices only to scale again more formidable ascents; struggling at every step with Nature in its most wonderful chaos, across a country badly watered, and where man labours hard to snatch from the soil a meagre harvest. Indeed, it required all the genius of the commander, all the sturdy courage and perseverance of the men, not to falter in the way and remain firm in the resolve "to set the captives free."

It is not my intention to speak of Eastern Abyssinia. At the meeting of the British Association, some months ago, it was

my good fortune to listen to a masterly summary of the labours of the very able geographer to the Expedition. My wish is to correct a false impression already too prevalent in England, and to discuss a conclusion too hastily assumed, reflecting, in my opinion, rather too unfavourably on the country at large, and too flattering still in its estimation of the inhabitants of the Abyssinian plateaux.

I have often, since my return to England, heard in the mouths of friends and strangers the short but graphic sentence, "Abyssinia is a wretched country." But I would venture to assert, did I not fear to be accused of jesting with mere words or of debating a foolish paradox, that the Abyssinian Expedition never entered Abyssinia at all.

The line of march necessity enforced upon our troops was the lofty irregular mountain-chain separating the sandy shores of the Red Sea from the plateaux, plains, and valleys of Abyssinia proper. A barren, desolate tract, the watershed of the Mareb, the Tacazzê, the Jitta, and the Bashelo, as different from the lands they beautify and enrich as the snow-capped peaks of the Swiss Alps, the cradle of many a mighty stream, are a dreary contrast to the rich and fertile regions watered by the Isel or the Rhone.

On the other hand, the inhabitants of the country with whom the English army came in contact on its ever-memorable march to Magdala are (apart from some of the people of Tigrè) the Shohos, the Azubos, and other Gallas, the degenerate Christian children of Wallo, and the mixed tribes of the Dalanta and Wadela plateaux.

I do not mean to infer that had the army selected another route, and passed through Dembea, Bagemder, Waggara, Metcha, or Damot, they would have been impressed with a less favourable opinion of the natives; on the contrary, I believe that the craftiness of the border tribes, and their gross, coarse immorality, would have been masked by the hypocritical plausible bearing none better than an Abyssinian can assume; and that one and all would have found but words of praise to extol the generous, kind-hearted Christians of Ethiopia. But if it was given to the Expedition to see only Abyssinia in its rude, desolate form, to admire the noble vista of a glorious alpine scenery, the unrivalled beauties of a wild, savage nature, they could but sigh, and turn away in sorrow before that ideal of a poet's and artist's land—but nothing more; and could, looking to the people around them, but forget their faults and pity and love them. The Shohos and the several Galla tribes, though somewhat unruly, were on their best behaviour: from Senafê

to the Bashelo, Sir William Merewether, the gifted, talented political officer, readily won the confidence of the natives and smoothed all possible difficulties. The high-minded Commander-in-chief, the people's friend, waged war with none but the arch-traitor Theodore, and was justly beloved and respected by all; and last, but not least, Maria Theresa dollars worked marvels: Tigrinians, as well as Gallas, grasped eagerly at the prize. An invading army paying its way, instead of plundering alike friends and foes, was an enigma none could solve, but that all gladly accepted. And although their want of truth, their sensuality, their thieving propensities will ever remain as a bye-word in the English army, still, on the whole, the true character of the Abyssinian, in the eyes of those who took a part in the Abyssinian Expedition, remains for them as hidden as the lands bathed by the Tana Sea, as unfolded as the noble panorama of yonder rich, fertile country, even a Theodore could not utterly destroy.

I may, some day, I trust, give by the analysis of facts that have fallen under my personal observation, an account of the Abyssinian people, representing them in their manners and customs, shewing them to the world in their true light, with their qualities and their faults: the vivid recollection of one whose privilege it has unfortunately been to have lived in their midst, a flattered and envied guest—a disgraced and insulted prisoner!

After leaving Metemma, the first 30 miles retain still many of the features of the plain, mingled here and there with the first vestiges of the mountain-ranges, rising so bold and grand on the distant horizon; stunted acacias, our constant companions in the Soudan, cover here again every rising ground, forming small detached woods, graced by tall venerable tamarinds, or entangled with some thorny varieties of the leguminosæ. The ravines and small valleys, luxuriant with tropical vegetation, are but miniatures of the glorious valley of the Atbara. All these have their rivulets, and, like the mighty tributary of the Nile, are lined with trees, similar to the boulevards of a great city, and surrounded by unweeded gardens, so lovely in their savage beauty.

When we passed, the tall grass was just losing its green tinge for a paler hue; trampled and beaten down on the almost hidden path, it covered like a carpet the stony ground,—a welcome friend to our barefooted followers. Every tiny valley, every cool ravine, rejoices in its brook of limpid water, a crystal line playing in flowery beds, glittering in the sun like a silver toy, the home of a countless host of a gaudy-feathered tribe, now bathing, now fluttering and coquetting, or uttering shrill

notes of joy as they gaze in wonder at their pretty image reflected in the clear gurgling water. Who will tell of the noble game, of the mighty fierce denizens of these valleys? The buffaloes' stampede is heard like a distant thunder; elephants were often our pioneers; the lion's roar echoes throughout the night; here a gazelle starts from under our feet, and there a boa has left his trail on the crushed grass. But day by day the scene changes; and as we approach Wahhnê, several hills, sentries of yonder blue mountains, lay in our route. The rounded hillocks give way to conical mountains or to small plateaux, diminutive models of the highland plains. Still the gum-trees, now and then the sycamore, further on the fir: but as we advance the whole country assumes a more barren aspect; the valleys are longer and wider, the stream deeper, more rapid, bounding, wearing away the earthy banks, and carrying to Egypt Abyssinia's valuable tribute. Each hill we cross has more and more the appearance of the temperate zone; and even the valleys, deep as they are—now several thousand feet above the Soudan plain—have lost much of the beautiful vegetation we so much admired, are stern, cold, and formal, nearly desolate, and, were it not for the bamboo forests, so stately, so erect, so lofty—giants laughing at us poor pigmies as we dodged through their thick, close lines—they would be as barren as the very hills themselves; volcanic rocks have now everywhere taken the place of alluvium, sandstone, or granite; columnar basalt shapes into ambas and forts the crest of many a mountain; our zigzag road is paved with dolomite, and pumice and conglomerate roll under our feet as we wade through the mountain torrent.

After leaving Sankwehâ, we cross the last small mountain-range that stood in our way, and from that elevation survey the whole space between us and the Abyssinian plateau. The mountain chain appears broken up, and the whole space dotted with closely packed isolated lofty peaks, separated by longitudinal valleys, all leading from one to another, and in the direction of the high land in front. At last we reach the foot of a towering perpendicular wall, some 2000 feet above our heads. The officers of our escort lead the way, and we follow, climbing the side of the precipice by a narrow, slippery footpath, at times so steep, so abrupt—enough to make the Alpine chamois giddy—that we shut our eyes, and dare not even cast a passing glance at the terrible yawning abyss below. Once fairly on the Abyssinian plateau, the traveller is amply rewarded for his pains; but what struck us, even more than the wonderful panorama displayed before our eyes, was the sudden and complete change in everything around us; and it seemed difficult to conceive that

only a few thousand feet separate such opposite and different climes.

To us for so long denizens of the plains, the mountain breeze appeared delightfully fresh and cool, and our old enemy, the sun, we contemptuously allowed to play over our uncovered heads. The grass short and fine; nay, daisies and blue bells! Could this be Africa, or were we the playthings of fancy, the victims of delusion, and awake dreaming of home and country strolls? A roll on the flower-speckled grass, a long pull of the fresh breeze, that best of stimulants, and feeling strong and refreshed, we stroll about in search of the unknown. Here is a charming bower—a blending of the sweet-smelling jessamine, and of the wild white rose; there, behind yonder village, a dense grove full of cactuses, dark with cedars, inclosed by roses, jessamines, and sweetbriar. But this is forbidden ground; we can only admire this Eden from a distance, inhale the fragrant perfume of the sacred trees, and, like curious naughty children, peep through the entangled branches. No building, no temple, no altar appears in this, one of the Kamânt's sanctuaries; sons, it is said, of Israel's land, still worshipping their Father's God, Jehovah, though here they call him Kebir the Glory—still children of an idolatrous race; but wisely spurning Baal and Moloch, they bow down before Nature's noblest works—trees and flowers!

Taking advantage of a halt, I rode back about half a mile from our encamping-ground, to cast a parting look on the road we had followed.

Standing on the verge of the precipice, the natural imposing strength of that mighty barrier revealed itself in all its beauty; it seemed to me as if I were gazing from the walls of some mighty citadel, the work of those Titans against whom a Jove alone could war. Sâr-Amba, to my right, and almost on a level with the plateau, appeared like a huge bastion, the worthy advanced work of such a fort; before me, stretching far away in the distant horizon, a succession of mountains, hills, and hillocks, dwindling down to mere specks, until they disappear in the rosy mist of the low lands. Gazing on that admirable confusion from the heights of Walli Dabba, the hills and mountains we had climbed and climbed appear as mere children's toys, scattered over the plains—as mere mounds of earth raised by man at the foot of the gigantic wall.

The many streams we had passed were but few compared to the countless sources of the Atbara, spreading far and wide; many, as they glittered in the sun amidst dark ravines, could be seen slowly flowing towards the north. To the right and left, as far as the naked eye could reach, the same basaltic wall; and

beneath, again, vales and rivers, mountains, hills, hillocks—as many stepping-stones for the Moslem of the plains to stride over to plant the crescent on the already tumbling cross, and crush in their foul embrace the last fading emblems of Africa's Christian faith.

A few miles from Walli Dabba, on our road to Kanohâ, the chief of our escort bids us himself abide awhile, and admire the gorgeous noble vista. Behind us a long blue line of mountains, running west to east, and towards their north-eastern extremity, under yonder almost hidden peak, a dimly-defined clump of trees marks the spot where Gondar then stood. From those mountains a green shelving plain, dotted with villages, and many ruins, watered by hundreds of rivulets, all flowing towards the south, stretches to the very margin of the lake, a fertile region—Dembea, Gondar's granary. To the left, more mountains, running north to south, seem to rise from the lake itself, towering higher and higher as they disappear towards the east; and, on a level with the loftiest peak, begins Abyssinia's noblest province, Bagemder, the land of sheep and corn. In front, the lake stretches far and wide, and beyond, toward the south, a dim outline—the bold towering Gojam range, but for us so faint, so pale, that were it not for a pure cloudless sky, we might have believed in some dark vapours playing with the genii of the Nile. To our right, extensive shelving, undulating plains, with now and then a dark peak on the distant horizon, some lonely amba in Theodore's native land, Kuara, or part of the range that bounds Atchefer towards the west.

Our route now leads us through a fine open country, up and down a succession of rounded hillocks, shelving towards the Tana Sea. No timber; hardly even a solitary tree; now and then a few thorny bushes; our favourites the wild rose and the jessamine; or a few kolquals in sheltered places. Altogether a wild looking savannah, replete with game—the home of herds of antelopes, staring vaguely as we pass along, and as yet untaught to see in every man an enemy, unmindful of our presence, resuming their interrupted meal.

Although the whole district from Walli Dabba to Kanohâ was little better than a wilderness, everywhere we perceived traces of recent prosperity. Ruins, dark, blackened ruins stare at us wherever we look; no cattle grazes on the fine delicate grass; no harvest rises in those fields, left to thorns and thistles. Taccosa was, as well as Dembea, a prosperous, populous, and fertile province—the happy home of thousands. Why such a waste? But let us pass on and be silent; let us pretend ignorance of the past; our guard's eyes are upon us, and this is Theodore's work!

To Goja the descent is gradual but constant; and that village, quite on a level with the lake itself, cannot be less than a thousand feet lower than the plateau of Walli Dabba. From that spot, Goja, the lake is not unlike a huge picture; green shelving shores, and blue distant highlands, are the frames worthy of such a gem.

From Goja to Belass we cross the same undulating plains; but near the lake itself, the ground is frequently marshy, and the many small creeks appear from a distance like green waving fields, so dense are the bulrushes.

Here we meet for the first time, since nearing the lake, with the fig-bearing sycamore; and at Amoos Gabea (the market of Thursday), with some fine specimens of the chuba, a laurineous tree under whose wide-spreading branches the villagers, from many a mile around, held in former days a weekly well-supplied market.

From Belass the ground insensibly but gradually shelves upwards towards the south and west. Villages now and then begin to appear, scattered, dispersed, and far apart, mingled with ruins—the same black ruin, the work of fire lighted by a pitiless hand, casting a gloom on the few standing hamlets a passing fancy allowed to remain. For the first time since leaving Walli Dabba, we see a few hungry-looking peasants, ploughing long stony fields, and urging their emaciated-looking bullocks, with shouts and cruel blows from the long hippopotamus whip, into a slow monotonous step.

As we advance, we leave the lake to our left. The undulating plain here gives way to more decided rounded mounds, separated now and then by miniature valleys, each with its clear running stream gurgling as it flows towards the Blue Nile's lake.

Volcanic rock is, up to Kanohâ, the general geological formation; a dark soil, the detritus of these rocks, covers to a depth of several feet the shelving plain we crossed, forming at some places on the shore of the lake itself a succession of earthy waves, shaped into tumuli by the tropical rains.

As I have already stated, when we passed through Taccosa, that province appeared as bleak and desolate as any wilderness could be; but such is the astonishing fertility of the soil, that although only a small proportion of the inhabitants, "on their pardon being proclaimed," found courage enough to return to their burnt-down villages, and till the ground the best way they could, Theodore some eighteen months afterwards again quarrelled with them, plundered and fed for several weeks his army and followers on what had seemed to us a sterile barren tract.

The provinces of Wandigê and Atchefer had not been plundered this time, and on a former expedition only partially

so; some of the cattle had been left to the peasants; the villages had not been burnt, nor the churches destroyed; and though they had not entirely escaped, like the more fortunate Agau Meder, a year had been more than sufficient to hide at least the traces of the tyrant's passage.

From Kanohâ to Ashfa (frontier of Damot), it is impossible to conceive a more lovely country, to dream of a more beautiful, fertile region, slightly hilly; the prospect is even more pleasing than the green plains watered by the Tana Sea.

The province of Wandigê, with its long, rolling, undulating ground, is something, I fancy, very much like the American prairie, studded here and there with isolated conical peaks, of an average height of 800 to 1000 feet. Mountain ranges appear to the west and south, the watershed of the Blue Nile; and by a gradual ascent, our route takes us across some small mountains, the foremost hills of the Gojam chain. Villages crown almost every mound, where the tall cedars, the sycamore, the gêshu, and wild coffee-tree point out the secluded spot, above which arises, half-hidden by the dense foliage, the modest Coptic cross.

Thousands of cattle graze over almost boundless natural meadows, watered by countless streams, and only checked in their vastness by endless cultivated fields, where in the same vista can be seen the peasant ploughing, the green sprouting corn, and the ripened harvest ready for the sickle.

We cross the Kiltee and enter the land of the Agaus; one tribe, it is said, originally with the Agaus of Lasta. Did they at one time possess themselves of Central Abyssinia, and limit their conquest by the Lasta Mountains and the Gojam chain? Were they, as some assert, the Autochthons, inhabitants of the land, driven and scattered east and west by the Amhara? No record of the past, no deed of the present day can bear out that theory. Not they, the brave hardy mountaineers of Lasta; the bold horsemen of Agau Meder; never has Amhara lance driven out of their father's land the gallant Agaus. They are conquerors, not a conquered race! Like other Galla hordes, they came some day from Central Africa: one section of the tribe settled on the lovely plateaux, watered by countless streams—a land of milk and honey; others of a more adventurous spirit pushed further on, and took possession of a mountainous district, better fitted for a war-loving clan. I like the Agaus; I like their fair handsome faces, their long silky hair, their well-knit forms, their daring, their courage, and, above all, feel grateful for their kind genial welcome, such as only a brave race can give!

Agau Meder—more favoured by nature, more prosperous even than Wandigê and Atchefer, a land of horse as well as cattle—was also more fortunate, and never fell under Theodore's dis-

pleasure. He was too cunning to attempt to plunder a land protected by such a valiant race. Here we saw the Galla cows, with their immense long horns, some 4 feet long, gracefully worn by small, short, well-knitted cattle. Here also we met with the wild peaches, sweet lime, and the beautiful kosso-tree, a noble, gracefully stately bunch of flowers, pink rose or yellowish white, dropping like golden grapes, a priceless remedy under a lovely form.

Onward we march, and the same fertility prevails everywhere, but the aspect of the country somewhat changes—more hilly, more wooded; we pass by Zugda, Karkatcha, Gardomite, Kauka —small towns rather than villages; churches and market-places, those signs of trade and piety, are nowhere more numerous. Nevertheless the Agaus are considered a rude and unchristian race. Churches may arise around their villages, but still at heart they are pagans, says the Amhara. For me who only saw them good, kind, and hospitable—whatever heresy may be grafted on their faith—I believe that they are truer followers of Him who loved such as them, than the vain-glorious, bigoted, self-worshipping Abyssinian.

We pass Korkuera and the River Terinka, flowing towards the Blue Nile. More villages, more cultivated fields, more flowery prairies, rich in horse and cattle. We cross the Kuashim and the Gamassu again to wind through rivers. Skirting hills on our left, we pass at the foot of the small picturesque amba of Zirihi; and leaving the hilly plain, now wind our way through wooded valleys, and ascend the white sandstone Mount of Injábara.

On the banks of the Messinie with regret we bid good-bye to our Agau friends, and pass into Damot.

Damot, the rich, the wealthy, the diamond amongst so many gems, why has prosperity departed from thy faithful sons? Why does desolation reign in abundant realms? Why? Ask Theodore. Only a few days before our arrival, the dark horsemen, the locust-like spearmen, have been told to kill and destroy, to plunder and burn. The blackened soil, the silent ruins, the ravaged fields, everywhere proclaim that the merciless order has been but too faithfully obeyed. But what dark crime, what perfidious deed warranted such a sentence? Did they rebel against the King of kings, smite his governors, fly from his presence, and curse his approach? No! brave men of Damot, you served him well and truly; but Theodore, once brave, is himself conquered by his evil passions. Tadla Gwalu, his mortal foe, guards the passes leading into Gojam. With his discontented, wavering host, Theodore fears to venture on an attack, and he destroys you out of friendship. He says so,

that on his departure you should not have to bear the rebel's yoke.

Another day's march, and we reach our journey's end. We approach the Imperial camp, so well hidden in valleys and woods from the gaze of all, that, were it not for the smoke arising from miles around yonder hill, graced by the white, red, and black tents of Theodore, we might have believed that the bold spirit of that strange man dwelt alone in that plundered, desolate region.

After a day's halt in the Emperor's camp, Theodore sends us word that on the morrow we will march with him. The army cries for bread, he says, and the bad peasants refuse to bring in any more supplies. Why not have spoken the truth, and said "The enemy protects their fields; to feed my army I must plunder the few districts faithful to me"?

Theodore's mode of travelling can be well understood by a glance at the map: sudden movements, cross-marches; one day marching towards the rising sun, the next day back again, and then turning to the north or west.

At the eastern extremity of a valley, on an average about a mile in width, separating Damot from Metcha, we crossed the Blue Nile. At that spot the river flows between well-wooded banks, some 10 feet high and about 30 feet in width; the stream is on an average from 2 to 3 feet in depth, the current moderate, and the bed stony.

We parted from Theodore at Fagitta, on the border of Agau Meder, and passed again through the same fertile region we had crossed a few days before, this time some miles to the eastward. Here again we met with a succession of small running streams, all flowing eastward towards the Nile. After a few days we once more followed our former route, and from Zugda back to the lake halted generally on the very same ground we had selected on a previous occasion.

We were bound for Kuarata, the principal commercial city on the eastern shore of the Tana Sea, almost opposite Kanohâ. Theodore had intimated the desire (his slightest wishes were ever for us formal orders) that we should abide at Kuarata until Consul Cameron and his party should have joined us. He advised us to cross the lake in native canoes, sending our horses and mules by land to Kuarata.

We did not tarry this time at Kanohâ, but pushed on at once for the lake, some 4 miles due east from that place, and encamped near a small Waito village on the very beach itself.

A few days were required to bring from Kuarata, Dek, and other ports, the several hundred bulrush canoes we required; and as the whole Imperial fleet at the time in existence was

not deemed sufficient to convey our large party, the Waitos were ordered at once to collect bulrushes and build a few dozen of these pretty but rather frail skiffs.

The poor Waitos at first sight are not very prepossessing, and to their uncouth appearance, as well as to their indulgence in the reputed unclean flesh of the hippopotamus, are they indebted for the kind of odium in which they are held. Supposed to be in league with boudas, ginns, and other evil spirits —a slur not to be despised in a land where to be feared is better than to be respected—they are generally left alone.

The Waitos rejoiced at the sight of our rifles, and were the first to propose to lead us against the huge quadruped, their foe and favourite food. Accustomed to attack the hippopotamus with their short spears, a chase full of dangers and perils, expert fishermen, the only sailors of that inland sea, bred to hardships and fierce struggles, they are brave and speak lightly of the fearful wounds but too often their share in the life and death strife between them and the infuriated monster. Many succumb in the exciting contest, whilst some, more fortunate, live to boast of their hard-won scars.

We did not join the Abyssinians in their odium against these poor people. On the contrary, finding them civil and obliging, we treated them with kindness, gave them unasked many a trifle, and saw with pleasure that they deeply felt our considerate manner, and knew, when treated as fellow-men, to behave as such.

On the 13th of February we were paddled over to the island of Dek, and to stimulate our splashers (I cannot call them rowers) we offered a prize for the three first arrivals. At starting the novelty of the idea and the hope of enriching themselves produced a considerable excitement amongst the Waitos; but after a while, when it appeared from the lead some of the canoes had gained that the race was over, the natural apathy of all Africans overcoming their excited passions made them turn a deaf ear to all appeals, and nothing we could say could induce them to try to redeem the day's fortune; the foremost, as well as last, resuming their ordinary snail pace.

Dek is a cluster of several islands. The two largest, separated by a narrow and deep channel, appear, except on near approach, to form only one, about 7 miles in length to a couple in breadth. Around them are grouped several of a smaller size; one of them, visible from a great distance, is merely a mountain-peak arising abruptly from the water.

The larger islands are inhabited, contain several large villages and four churches, all of great sanctity. Large and small are all well wooded; and no prettier spot, no more fairy-like islands,

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could be imagined than those of Dek. They give to the scenery a charm even the Leman, with all its beauties, cannot rival. Nothing can be more graceful, on near approach, than their dark basaltic walls, a few feet above the water, covered with a splendid luxuriant vegetation, gracefully bending over the sides and reflecting their charming shadows in the deep-blue waters of the lake.

The following morning we started for Kuarata, and we arrived within stone-throw of that city, so well concealed by the wide-spreading sycamores and lofty cedars before we had even suspected its proximity.

Kuarata is a very ancient city. King Claudius's queen built and endowed a church on that small headland; and, as Abyssinia was at all times a land of strife and warfare, merchants eagerly sought the protection of such a sacred asylum, and soon an important commercial city arose at the foot of the Church of Kedûs-Georgis. Many of the houses are built of stone and mud, and those of the principal merchants boast of wooden doors, square rooms, and ornamental ceilings. Some of the best houses were placed at our disposal; but we were too fond of cleanliness, fresh air, and abundance of water, not to avail ourselves of the proximity of the lake.

Kuarata is built on the side of a rising ground, a small basaltic hill, bathed at its feet by the waters of the lake; and from the sacred eminence a succession of mountains and plateaux lead to the high range forming the western boundary of Bagemder. South of Kuarata, the land is for miles low, somewhat marshy, stretching in the direction of the Nile, intersected here and there by small basaltic promontories, and crossed by a river some 10 feet wide, on an average from 5 to 10 feet deep, flowing from the eastward towards the lake in such a calm, torpid manner that at first sight I was inclined to believe that canals had been introduced into Abyssinia.

Our two trips to Zagê are sufficiently well known to allow me to pass them over in silence.

Zagê is a long promontory, about 600 feet above the level of the lake, and connected with the mainland by a small, narrow strip of land, a few feet only above the lake, and surrounded by flat, marshy ground, the home of thousands of hippopotami. From the church, standing as it does on the very extremity of the promontory and built on the highest peak, the view is, indeed, splendid. On a clear day almost all the lake is visible. To the westward we have Wandigê, and the Blue Nile winding its way through Metcha, the guardian genius of those endless meadows; at the south-east extremity of the lake some lowland, and again the Nile, now strong, bearing away the waters

of its great lake, soon to disappear behind the high Gojam range. To the north, the island of Dek, appearing from the peak of Zagê so near, so distinct, as almost to tempt the bewitched admirer into a mad, giddy leap. Further on, Kuarata and the island of Metraha; and though occasionally we had a glimpse of the highlands near Gorgora, we could never follow the outline of the lake between Kuarata and the eastern extremity of the Waggara range. The lake, no doubt, makes there a great bend towards the east, and moreover, from what I have been told, the shores in that direction are low and marshy.

Turning towards the south, we follow the long, even plains of Metcha, stretching to the foot of the first mountain-range in the province of Damot, the blue mountains receding, like an amphitheatre, towards the south, until they disappear, only to leave a few elevated peaks, landmarks of the Valley of the Nile and of the present limits between Abyssinia and the several Galla tribes.

Of all the towns on the shores of the Tana Sea, if not on a par, at least next to Kuarata, came, for prosperity, wealth, and importance, the garden town of Zagê. Many had been the palmy days of that thriving important mart, the great depôt of the various products of Metcha, Damot, Agau Meder, and Gojam. Nor was it simply a dreary, bustling metropolis. Nature herself had not been idle: coffee-trees, gêshu, cedars, and sycamores transformed into one immense garden the sloping mountain, and adorned alike the peasant's abode, the market-place, and the precincts of the holy church.

We were unfortunate again on this occasion, and visited Zagê some weeks too late. Trampled, broken down, half torn-up trees alone proclaimed the past pleasing aspect of the place; and all that we saw of the remains of a city of at least 5000 inhabitants were round hard patches, cold-looking blotches on the greensward, the only standing record of the houses that sheltered the children of the land; homes wantonly pulled down to build a palace for a tyrant, where he might, in regal dignity, receive and treacherously arrest his English guests, leaving the poor, stripped, plundered natives to wander in the marshes of Metcha, yet happy to die of want and misery rather than fall under the pitiless hand of their heartless ruler.

Except towards its north-east extremity, we have been able to arrive at a very accurate knowledge of the Tana Sea. We saw it, in its general outline, first from the heights of Walli Dabba; secondly, from the promontory of Zagê; we followed it along the western shores from Tankal to Kanohâ, and crossed it, in native canoes, from Wandigê to Dek and Kuarata, and several times between that city and Zagê. Theodore had, for once,

told us the truth, when, on leaving him in Agau Meder, he, said, "I send you to Kuarata, as I know from Plowden that Englishmen like our lake." He was right: we enjoyed the lake immensely; we loved its clear, fresh water, its calm stillness, the blue mountains and dark islands reflected in its unruffled surface. We were never tired of gazing on the plying canoes; on the grotesque frolics of the snorting hippopotami; at the long files of laughing maidens, winding their way along the beach, bending under the weight of large water-jars; the very bulrushes themselves had their charms! Without the lake the few, very few, happy days we spent in Abyssinia would not live in our memory, a pleasing contrast to our many misfortunes. We had been wise in leaving the sacred city for the fresh breezes of the lake. Our tents were pitched so near the water that the playful tiny waves tried to wet us with their spray. A step, and a cool refreshing bath awaited us, — a luxury prejudice denies to the bigoted Amhara. If fond of sports, we seize the gun and sit on the nearest rock. The many water-fowl, the geese, the ducks, are all so tame that we need not stir; they will come to us, and almost seem to say, "We are here; pray, shoot us!" And for those who prefer the fishing-rod, they have fish so plentiful, so delicate, that we could well understand the priests' long fasts.

Geologically speaking, the lake can be compared to a huge crater. The shores, the islands, the surrounding mountains all are volcanic, basalt being the prominent feature. The shores are formed by a succession of small bays, separated by projecting headlands. The generality of these creeks are more or less marshy, green with immense fields of reeds, spreading out at places to such an extent that it is difficult to ascertain where the water ends and the land begins. The projecting headlands, —be they promontories like Zagê or Gorgora, or small and nameless—are all fashioned after one pattern; basaltic rocks arise abruptly from the deep waters at places so profound as to be entirely free from the breeze-loving bulrushes.

Such is, in its general outline, the Tana Sea and the several provinces of Western Abyssinia we passed through. The climate, on the whole, is good; in the valley of the lake itself some parts are feverish and unhealthy. The heat also, in the middle of the day, is not sufficiently tempered by the cool mountain breezes; but some miles from the lake, or a few hundred feet above its level, even the plateau of Chelga, the high plains of Atchefer and Agau, with all their many advantages, cannot, in that respect, claim any superiority. All are alike cool, pleasant, and healthy. Western Abyssinia is within the range of the tropical rains: there much earlier, longer, and more important than in

Eastern and Northern Abyssinia. The whole—be it valleys, plains, or plateaux—is watered by countless streams; the soil, the detritus of volcanic rocks, is so rich, of such fertility, and enjoying as it does so many climatic advantages, we cannot be surprised if three harvests are usually reaped in a year. Teff, the staple food of the country, grows almost everywhere, except on the higher plateaux, where corn and barley thrive so well. Cotton covers the plains of Foggara; wine is made from the grapes of Mahdera Mariam; honey, fragrant from the sweet perfume of wild flowers, is ludicrously abundant; and the herds of cattle, in peaceful times, of such magnitude, in numbers hardly to be credited, enough to supply a thousand cities! Western Abyssinia, well may we exclaim, is indeed a land of milk and honey: a "land blessed by God, but cursed by man!"

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